Iran

International Religious Freedom Report 2004

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The Constitution declares the "official religion of Iran is Islam, and the doctrine followed is that of Ja'fari (Twelver) Shi'ism." The Government restricts freedom of religion.

There was no substantive change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Members of the country's religious minorities--including Sunni and Sufi Muslims, Baha'is, Jews, and Christians--reported imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on their religious beliefs. Government actions created a threatening atmosphere for some religious minorities, especially Baha'is, Jews, and evangelical Christians.

The U.S. Government makes clear its objections to the Government's treatment of religious minorities through public statements, through support for relevant U.N. and nongovernmental organization (NGO) efforts, as well as through diplomatic initiatives among all states concerned about religious freedom in the country. Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated Iran as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for its particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

In December 2003, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 58/195 on the human rights situation in the country that expressed serious concern about the continued discrimination against religious minorities by the Government.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of approximately 631,660 square miles, and its population is approximately 69 million. The population is approximately 99 percent Muslim, of which approximately 89 percent are Shi'a and 10 percent are Sunni, mostly Turkomen, Arabs, Baluchs, and Kurds living in the southwest, southeast, and northwest. Sufi Brotherhoods are popular, but there are no reliable figures available regarding the size of the Sufi population.

Baha'is, Jews, Christians, Mandaeans, and Zoroastrians constitute less than 1 percent of the population combined. The largest non-Muslim minority is the Baha'i community, which has an estimated 300,000 to 350,000 adherents throughout the country. Estimates on the size of the Jewish community vary from 20,000 to 30,000. This figure represents a substantial reduction from the estimated 75,000 to 80,000 Jews who resided in the country prior to the 1979 Islamic revolution. According to U.N. figures, there are approximately 300,000 Christians, the majority of whom are ethnic Armenians and Assyro-Chaldeans. There also are Protestant denominations, including evangelical churches. The U.N. Special Representative reported that Christians are emigrating at an estimated rate of 15,000 to 20,000 per year. The Mandaeans, a community whose religion draws on pre-Christian gnostic beliefs, number approximately 5,000 to 10,000 persons, with members residing primarily in Khuzestan in the southwest.

The Government estimates the Zoroastrian community at 35,000 adherents. Zoroastrian groups, however, cite a larger figure of approximately 60,000. Zoroastrians mainly are ethnic Persians and are concentrated in the cities of Tehran, Kerman, and Yazd. Zoroastrianism was the official religion of the pre-Islamic Sassanid Empire and thus played a central role in the country's history.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Government restricts freedom of religion. The Constitution declares the "official religion of Iran is Islam and the doctrine followed is that of Ja'fari (Twelver) Shi'ism." All laws and regulations must be consistent with the official interpretation of the Shari'a (Islamic law). The Constitution states that "within the limits of the law," Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians are the only recognized religious minorities who are guaranteed freedom to practice their religion; however, members of minority religious groups have reported imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on their religious beliefs. Adherents of religions not recognized by the Constitution do not enjoy the freedom to practice their beliefs. This restriction seriously affects adherents of the Baha'i Faith, which the Government regards as a heretical Islamic group with a political orientation that is antagonistic to the country's Islamic revolution. However, Baha'is view themselves as an independent religion with origins in the Shi'a Islamic tradition. Government officials have stated that, as individuals, all Bahai's are entitled to their beliefs and are protected under the articles of the Constitution as citizens; however, the Government has continued to prohibit Baha'is from teaching and practicing their faith.

The Government rules by a religious jurisconsult. The Supreme Leader, chosen by a group of 83 Islamic scholars, oversees the State's decision-making process. All acts of the Majlis (legislative body, or Parliament) must be reviewed for conformity with Islamic law and the Constitution by the Council of Guardians, which is composed of six clerics appointed by the Supreme Leader, as well as six Muslim jurists (legal scholars) nominated by the Head of the Judiciary and elected by the Majlis.

The Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance (Ershad) and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security monitor religious activity closely. Adherents of recognized religious minorities are not required to register individually with the Government; however, their communal, religious, and cultural events and organizations, including schools, are monitored closely. Registration of Baha'is is a police function. The Government has pressured evangelical Christian groups to compile and submit membership lists for their congregations, but evangelicals have resisted this demand. Non-Muslim owners of grocery shops are required to indicate their religious affiliation on the fronts of their shops.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

By law and practice, religious minorities are not allowed to be elected to a representative body or to hold senior government or military positions; however, 5 of a total 270 seats in the Majlis are reserved for religious minorities. Three of these seats are reserved for members of the Christian faith, one for a member of the Jewish faith, and one for a member of the Zoroastrian faith. While members of the Sunni Muslim minority do not have reserved seats in the Majlis, they are allowed to serve in the body. Members of religious minorities, including Sunni Muslims, are allowed to vote. All religious minorities suffer varying degrees of officially sanctioned discrimination, particularly in the areas of employment, education, and housing. The Government does not protect the right of citizens to change or renounce their religious faith. Apostasy, specifically conversion from Islam, can be punishable by death; however, there were no reported cases of the death penalty being applied for apostasy during the period covered by this report.

Members of religious minorities, excluding Sunni Muslims, are prevented from serving in the judiciary and security services and from becoming public school principals. Applicants for public sector employment are screened for their adherence to and knowledge of Islam. Government workers who do not observe Islam's principles and rules are subject to penalties. The Constitution states that the country's army must be Islamic and must recruit individuals who are committed to the objectives of the Islamic revolution; however, in practice no religious minorities are exempt from military service.

University applicants are required to pass an examination in Islamic theology, which limits the access of most religious minorities to higher education, although all public school students, including non-Muslims, must study Islam. During the period covered by this report, for the first time Baha'i

students were allowed to participate in the nationwide college entrance examination that determines who may attend state-run universities, although none actually had received admission to a university at the end of the period covered by this report. The Government generally allows recognized religious minorities to conduct religious education for their adherents. This includes separate and privately funded Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian schools; however, official Baha'i schools are not allowed. The Ministry of Education, which imposes certain curriculum requirements, supervises these schools. With few exceptions, the directors of such private schools must be Muslim. Attendance at the schools is not mandatory for recognized religious minorities. The Ministry of Education must approve all textbooks used in coursework, including religious texts. Recognized religious minorities may provide religious instruction in non-Persian languages, but such texts require approval by the authorities for use. This approval requirement sometimes imposes significant translation expenses on minority communities.

The legal system also discriminates against religious minorities who receive lower awards than Muslims in injury and death lawsuits and incur heavier punishments. In 2002 the Sixth Majlis approved a bill that would make the amount of "blood money" (diyeh) paid by a perpetrator for killing or wounding a Christian, Jew, or Zoroastrian man the same as it would be for killing or wounding a Muslim; the bill ultimately was passed by the Guardian Council. All women and Baha'i men were excluded from the equalization provisions of the bill. According to law, Baha'i blood is considered "Mobah," meaning it can be spilled with impunity.

Sunni Muslims are the largest religious minority in the country, claiming a membership of approximately 10 million (10 percent of the population) consisting mostly of Turkomen, Arabs, Baluchs, and Kurds living in the southwest, southeast, and northwest. The Constitution provides Sunni Muslims a large degree of religious freedom, although it forbids a Sunni Muslim from becoming President. Sunni Muslims claim that the Government discriminates against them; however, it is difficult to distinguish whether the cause for discrimination is religious or ethnic, since most Sunnis are also ethnic minorities. Sunnis cite the lack of a Sunni mosque in Tehran, despite the presence of over 1 million Sunnis there, as a prominent example of this discrimination. Sunnis also have cited as proof of discrimination the lack of Sunni representation in appointed offices in provinces where Sunnis form a majority, such as Kurdistan province, as well as the reported inability of Sunnis to obtain senior governmental positions. Sunnis have also charged that the state broadcasting company Voice and Vision airs programming insulting to Sunnis.

In April Sunni Majlis representatives sent a letter to Supreme Leader Khamene'i decrying the lack of Sunni presence in the executive and judiciary branch of government, especially in higher-ranking positions in embassies, universities, and other institutions. They called on Khamene'i to issue a decree halting anti-Sunni propaganda in the mass media, books, and publications; the measure would include the state-run media. The Sunni representatives also requested adherence to the constitutional articles ensuring equal treatment of all ethnic groups.

The Baha'i Faith originated in the country during the 1840s as a reformist movement within Shi'a Islam. The Government considers Baha'is to be apostates because of their claim to a valid religious revelation subsequent to that of Mohammed, despite the fact that Baha'is do not consider themselves to be Muslim. Additionally, the Baha'i Faith is defined by the Government as a political "sect," linked to the Pahlavi regime and hence counterrevolutionary. A 2001 Ministry of Justice report demonstrates that government policy continued to aim for the eventual elimination of the Baha'is as a community. It stated in part that Baha'is would be permitted to enroll in schools only if they did not identify themselves as Baha'is, and that Baha'is preferably should be enrolled in schools with a strong and imposing religious ideology. The report also stated that Baha'is must be expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once their identity becomes known.

Baha'is may not teach or practice their faith or maintain links with coreligionists abroad. The fact that the Baha'i world headquarters (established by the founder of the Baha'i Faith in the 19th century, in what was then Ottoman-controlled Palestine) is situated in what is now the state of Israel exposes Baha'is to government charges of "espionage on behalf of Zionism." These charges are more acute when Bahai's are caught communicating with or sending monetary contributions to the Baha'i headquarters.

Baha'is are banned from government employment. In addition Baha'is are regularly denied compensation for injury or criminal victimization.

The Government allows recognized religious minorities to establish community centers and certain cultural, social, athletic, or charitable associations that they finance themselves. However, the Government prohibits the Baha'i community from official assembly and from maintaining administrative institutions by actively closing such Baha'i institutions. Since the Baha'i Faith has no clergy, the denial of the right to form such institutions and elect officers threatens its existence in the country.

Broad restrictions on Baha'is undermine their ability to function as a community. Baha'is repeatedly have been offered relief from mistreatment in exchange for recanting their faith. Baha'i cemeteries, holy places, historical sites, administrative centers, and other assets were seized shortly after the 1979 Revolution. No properties have been returned, and many have been destroyed.

Baha'is are not allowed to bury and honor their dead in keeping with their religious tradition. In 2002 the Government offered the Tehran Baha'i community a plot of land for use as a cemetery; however, the land was in the desert and had no access to water, making it impossible to perform Baha'i mourning rituals. In addition the Government stipulated that no markers be put on individual graves and that no mortuary facilities be built on the site, making it impossible to perform a ceremonial burial in the Baha'i tradition.

Baha'i group meetings and religious education, which often take place in private homes and offices, are curtailed severely. Public and private universities continue to deny admittance to Baha'i students.

Over the past several years, the Government has taken a few positive steps in recognizing the rights of Baha'is as well as of other religious minorities. For example, in recent years the Government has eased some restrictions, permitting Baha'is to obtain food-ration booklets and send their children to public elementary and secondary schools. In 1999 President Khatami publicly stated that persons should not be persecuted because of their religious beliefs. He vowed to defend the civil rights of all citizens, regardless of their beliefs or religion. Subsequently, the Expediency Council approved the "Right of Citizenship" bill, affirming the social and political rights of all citizens and their equality before the law. In 2000 the country began allowing couples to be registered as husband and wife without being required to state their religious affiliation. The measure effectively permits the registration of Baha'i marriages. Previously, Baha'i marriages were not recognized by the Government, leaving Baha'i women open to charges of prostitution. Children of Baha'i marriages had not been recognized as legitimate and therefore were denied inheritance rights.

While Jews are a recognized religious minority, allegations of official discrimination are frequent. The Government's anti-Israel policies, along with a perception among radical Muslims that all Jewish citizens support Zionism and the State of Israel, create a hostile atmosphere for the small community. For example, during the period covered by this report many newspapers celebrated the one-hundredth anniversary of the publishing of the anti-Semitic "Protocols of the Elders of Zion." Jewish leaders reportedly are reluctant to draw attention to official mistreatment of their community due to fear of government reprisal.

In principle, but with some exceptions, there is little restriction of or interference with the Jewish religious practice; however, education of Jewish children has become more difficult in recent years. The Government reportedly allows Hebrew instruction, recognizing that it is necessary for Jewish religious practice. However, it strongly discourages the distribution of Hebrew texts, in practice making it difficult to teach the language. Moreover, the Government has required that several Jewish schools remain open on Saturdays, the Jewish Sabbath, in conformity with the schedule of other schools in the school system. Since working or attending school on the Sabbath violates Jewish law, this requirement has made it impossible for observant Jews both to attend school and adhere to a fundamental tenet of their religion.

Jewish citizens are permitted to obtain passports and to travel outside the country, but they often are denied the multiple-exit permits normally issued to other citizens. With the exception of certain

business travelers, the authorities require Jewish persons to obtain clearance and pay additional fees before each trip abroad. The Government appears concerned about the emigration of Jewish citizens and permission generally is not granted for all members of a Jewish family to travel outside the country at the same time. According to the U.N. High Commission for Refugees' (UNHCR) background paper on the country, the Mandaeans are regarded as Christians and are included among the country's three recognized religious minorities. However, Mandaeans regard themselves not as Christians but as adherents of a religion that predates Christianity in both belief and practice. Mandaeans enjoyed official support as a distinct religion prior to the Revolution, but their legal status as a religion since then has been the subject of debate in the Majlis and has not been clarified. The small community faces discrimination similar to that faced by the country's other religious minorities. There were reports that members of the Mandaean community experience societal discrimination and pressure to convert to Islam, and they often are denied access to higher education. Mandaean refugees have reported specific religious freedom violations and concerns such as being forced to observe Islamic fasting rituals and to pray in Islamic fashion, both in direct violation of Mandaean teaching.

Sufi organizations outside the country remain concerned about government repression of Sufi religious practices, including the constant harassment and intimidation of prominent Sufi leaders by the intelligence and security services.

The Government enforces gender segregation in most public spaces and prohibits women from interacting openly with unmarried men or men not related to them; however, as a practical matter these prohibitions have loosened in recent years. Women must ride in a reserved section on public buses and enter public buildings, universities, and airports through separate entrances. Violators of these restrictions face punishments such as flogging or monetary fines. Women are prohibited from attending male sporting events, although this restriction does not appear to be enforced universally. Women are not free to choose what they wear in public, although enforcement of rules for conservative Islamic dress has eased in recent years. Women are subject to harassment by the authorities if their dress or behavior is considered inappropriate and are sentenced to flogging or imprisonment for such violations. The law prohibits the publication of pictures of uncovered women in the print media, including pictures of foreign women. There are penalties, including flogging and monetary fines, for failure to observe norms of Islamic dress at work.

The law provides for segregation of the sexes in medical care. Only female physicians can treat women; however, women reportedly often receive inferior care because of the imbalance between the number of trained and licensed male and female physicians and specialists.

Legally, the testimony of a woman is worth only half that of a man in court. A married woman must obtain the written consent of her husband before she may travel outside the country. The law provides for stoning for adultery; however, in 2002 the Government suspended this practice.

All women, regardless of their age, must have the permission of their father or a living male relative to marry. The law allows for the practice of Siqeh, or temporary marriage, a Shi'a custom in which a woman or a girl may become the wife of a married or single Muslim male after a simple and brief religious ceremony. The woman has to consent to Siqeh, which is a civil contract between two parties, and each party stipulates the condition under which he or she enters into the agreement. The bond is not recorded on identification documents, and according to Islamic law, men may have as many Siqeh wives as they wish. Such wives usually are not granted rights associated with traditional marriage.

Women have the right to divorce, and regulations promulgated in 1984 substantially broadened the grounds on which a woman may seek a divorce. However, a husband is not required to cite a reason for divorcing his wife. In 1986 the Government issued a 12-point "contract" to serve as a model for marriage and divorce, which limits the privileges accorded to men by custom and traditional interpretations of Islamic law. The model contract also recognized a divorced woman's right to a share in the property that couples acquire during their marriage and to increased alimony rights. Women who remarry are forced to give up custody of children from earlier marriages to the child's father. The law allows for the granting of custody of minor children to the mother in certain divorce cases in which the father is proven unfit to care for the child.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In February authorities initiated the destruction of the tomb of Quddus, a Baha'i holy site. Local Baha'is attempted to prevent the destruction through legal channels, but the tomb was destroyed in the interim. The Baha'is were not allowed permission to enter the site and retrieve the remains of this revered Baha'i figure. On June 27, the house of the father of the faith's founder, Mirza Buzarg-e-Nuri, was destroyed without notice. The house was confiscated before by the Government and was of great religious significance because the founder of the Baha'i faith, Baha'u'llah, had lived there.

According to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, since 1979 more than 200 Baha'is have been killed, 15 have disappeared and are presumed dead, and more than 10,000 Baha'is have been dismissed from government and university jobs. The Government continued to imprison and detain Baha'is based on their religious beliefs.

During the period covered by this report, one Baha'i was serving a prison sentence for practicing his faith. He was convicted of apostasy for being a Baha'i in 1996, but his death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment by President Khatami in 1999. His property and assets reportedly were confiscated because his family members were Baha'is. In May 2003, a Baha'i prisoner was released following a visit by the U.N. Human Rights Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. In February two Baha'is held for practicing their faith were released after serving their full 15-year sentences.

The Government harasses the Baha'i community by arresting Baha'is arbitrarily, charging them, and then releasing them, often without dropping the charges against them. Those with charges still pending against them reportedly fear rearrest at any time.

According to Baha'i sources in the United States, since 2002 23 Baha'is from 18 different localities were arbitrarily arrested and detained for a short time because of their Baha'i faith. None of these persons was in prison at the end of the period covered by this report.

Government action against Baha'i education continued during the period covered by this report. The property rights of Bahai's are generally disregarded, and they suffer frequent government harassment and persecution. Since 1979 the Government has confiscated large numbers of private and business properties belonging to Baha'is. According to Baha'i sources, an Islamic Revolutionary Court rejected the appeal of a Baha'i to return his confiscated property on the grounds that he held Baha'i classes in his home and had a library of over 900 Baha'i books. Numerous Baha'i homes reportedly have been seized and handed over to an agency of Supreme Leader Khamene'i. Sources indicate that property was confiscated in Rafsanjan, Kerman, Marv-Dasht, and Yazd. Several Baha'i farmers in the southern part of the country were arrested, and one who was jailed for several days was only freed after paying a "fine." Authorities reportedly also confiscated Baha'i properties in Kata, forced several families to leave their homes and farmlands, imprisoned some farmers, and did not permit others to harvest their crops. In one instance, a Baha'i woman from Isfahan, who legally had traveled abroad, returned to find that her home had been confiscated. The Government also has seized private homes in which Baha'i youth classes were held despite the owners having proper ownership documents. The Baha'i community claims the Government's seizure of Baha'i personal property and its denial of Baha'i access to education and employment are eroding the economic base of the community.

It has become somewhat easier for Baha'is to obtain passports in the last 2 to 3 years. In addition some Iranian embassies abroad do not require applicants to state a religious affiliation. In such cases, it is easier for Baha'is to renew passports.

The Government vigilantly enforces its prohibition on proselytizing activities by evangelical Christians by closing their churches and arresting Christian converts. Members of evangelical congregations have been required to carry membership cards, photocopies of which must be provided to the authorities. Worshippers are subject to identity checks by authorities posted outside congregation centers. The Government has restricted meetings for evangelical services to Sundays, and church officials have been ordered to inform the Ministry of Information and Islamic Guidance before admitting new members to their congregations.

Conversion of a Muslim to a non-Muslim religion is considered apostasy under Iranian law and is punishable by the death penalty, although it is unclear that this punishment has been enforced in recent years. Similarly, non-Muslims may not proselytize Muslims without putting their own lives at risk. Evangelical church leaders are subject to pressure from authorities to sign pledges that they will not evangelize Muslims or allow Muslims to attend church services.

In previous years, the Government harassed churchgoers in Tehran, in particular worshippers at the capital's Assembly of God congregation. This harassment has included conspicuous monitoring outside Christian premises by Revolutionary Guards to discourage Muslims or converts from entering church premises, as well as demands for the presentation of the identity papers of worshippers inside. In May there were reports of the arrest of evangelical Christians in the northern part of the country, including a Christian pastor and his family in Mazandaran Province. The pastor's family and two other church leaders who had been arrested earlier were reportedly released on May 30. Although the pastor reportedly was a convert from the Baha'i Faith, a number of those arrested in raids on house churches were converts from Islam. The pastor and another Christian leader were released from custody in early July.

In 2000, 10 of 13 Jews arrested in 1999 were convicted on charges of illegal contact with Israel, conspiracy to form an illegal organization, and recruiting agents. Along with 2 Muslim defendants, the 10 Jews received prison sentences ranging from 4 to 13 years. An appeals court subsequently overturned the convictions for forming an illegal organization and recruiting agents, but it upheld the convictions for illegal contacts with Israel with reduced sentences. One of the 10 was released in February 2001 and another in January 2002, both upon completion of their prison terms. Three additional prisoners were released before the end of their sentences in October 2002. In April 2003, it was announced that the last five were to be released. It is not clear if the eight who were released before the completion of their sentences were fully pardoned or were released provisionally. During and shortly after the trial, Jewish businesses in Tehran and Shiraz were targets of vandalism and boycotts, and Jewish persons reportedly have suffered personal harassment and intimidation. There were no reports of vandalism or similar harassment during the period covered by this report.

In 2002, the group Families of Iranian Jewish Prisoners (FIJP) published the names of 12 Jews who disappeared while attempting to escape from the country in the 1990s. The families continued to report anecdotal evidence that some of the men were in prisons. The Government never has provided any information regarding their whereabouts and claims that it has not charged any of them with crimes. FIJP believes that the Government has dealt with these cases differently than it has with other similar cases because the persons involved are Jewish. The families of the missing individuals reported that government officials claimed they lacked the authority to discover whether the missing individuals were being detained.

Numerous Sunni clerics have been killed in recent years, some allegedly by government agents. While the exact reason for their murders are unknown, most Sunni Muslims in the country belong to ethnic minorities who historically have suffered abuse by the central Government.

There were no reports of government harassment of the Zoroastrian community during the period covered by this report; however, the community remains unable to convene a Spiritual Assembly to manage its religious affairs for fear of official retaliation, and there were reports of discrimination in employment and education. In June Zoroastrians were able to make, apparently without government interference, their annual pilgrimage to one of the holiest sites in their faith, the temple of Chak-Chak (near the city of Yazd).

The Government carefully monitors the statements and views of the country's senior Shi'a religious leaders. It has restricted the movement of several Shi'a religious leaders who have been under house arrest for years, including Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who was released from 5 years of house arrest in January 2003.

The Special Clerical Court (SCC) system, established in 1987 to investigate offenses and crimes committed by clerics and which the Supreme Leader oversees directly, is not provided for in the Constitution and operates outside the domain of the judiciary. In particular critics alleged that the clerical courts were used to prosecute certain clerics for expressing controversial ideas and for

participating in activities outside the area of religion, including journalism.

Laws based on religion have been used to stifle freedom of expression. Independent newspapers and magazines have been closed, and leading publishers and journalists were imprisoned on vague charges of "insulting Islam" or "calling into question the Islamic foundation of the Republic." In 2002, academic Hashem Aghajari was sentenced to death for blasphemy against the Prophet Mohammed, based on a speech in which he challenged Muslims not to follow blindly the clergy, provoking an international and domestic outcry. In February 2003, his death sentence was revoked by the Supreme Court, but the case was sent back to the lower court for retrial. He was retried in July 2003 on charges that did not include apostasy and was sentenced to 5 years, 2 of which were suspended, and 5 years of additional "deprivation of social right" (meaning that he cannot teach or write books or articles). His time served was counted towards his 3-year sentence, with the remainder of the time being converted by the court to a fine.

Forced Religious Conversions

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States. However, a child born to a Muslim father automatically is considered a Muslim.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The continuous presence of the country's pre-Islamic, non-Muslim communities, such as Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians, has accustomed the population to the participation of non-Muslims in society; however, government actions continued to create a threatening atmosphere for some religious minorities.

The Jewish community has been reduced to less than one-half of its prerevolutionary size. Some of this emigration is connected with the larger, general waves of departures following the establishment of the Islamic Republic, but some also stems from continued perceived anti-Semitism on the part of the Government and within society.

The Government's anti-Israel policies and the trial of the 13 Jews in 2000, along with the perception among some of the country's radicalized elements that Jews support Zionism and the State of Israel, created a threatening atmosphere for the Jewish community (see Section II). Many Jews have sought to limit their contact with or support for the State of Israel out of fear of reprisal. Recent anti-American and anti-Israeli demonstrations have included the denunciation of "Jews," as opposed to the past practice of denouncing only "Israel" and "Zionism," adding to the threatening atmosphere for the community.

Sunni Muslims encounter religious discrimination at the local, provincial, and national levels, and there were reports of discrimination against practitioners of the Sufi tradition during the period covered by this report. Sufis were also targeted by the Country's intelligence and security services.

In June 2003, an interfaith delegation of U.S. Christians, Jews, and Muslims traveled to the country to meet with religious, political, and cultural leaders.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The United States has no diplomatic relations with the country, and thus it cannot raise directly the restrictions that the Government places on religious freedom and other abuses the Government

commits against adherents of minority religions. The U.S. Government makes its position clear in public statements and reports, support for relevant U.N. and NGO efforts, and diplomatic initiatives to press for an end to government abuses.

From 1982 to 2001, the U.S. Government co-sponsored a resolution each year regarding the human rights situation in the country offered by the European Union at the annual meeting of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). It passed every year until 2002, when the United States did not have a seat on the commission, and the resolution failed passage by one vote. The U.S. has supported a similar resolution offered each year during the U.N. General Assembly until the fall of 2002, when no resolution was tabled. The U.S. Government strongly supported the work of the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Human Rights for Iran and called on the Government to grant him admission and allow him to conduct his research during the period of his mandate, which expired with the defeat of the resolution at the UNCHR in 2002. There also was no resolution on the country at the UNCHR in the spring of 2003. In 2003 the Canadian Government introduced a resolution censuring the country's human rights policies, which was passed by the U.N. General Assembly. The U.S. remains supportive of efforts to raise the human rights situation whenever appropriate within international organizations.

On numerous occasions, the U.S. State Department spokesman has addressed the situation of the Baha'i and Jewish communities in the country. The U.S. Government has encouraged other governments to make similar statements and has urged them to raise the issue of religious freedom in discussions with the Government.

Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated Iran as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

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